The Armor Battalion After Next

A Modest Proposal

by Lieutenant Colonel Kevin C.M. Benson

"I have seen the future of warfare...The Army's ability to use information to dominate future battles will give the United States a new key to victory, I believe, for years, if not for generations to come."

—Secretary of Defense William Cohen

(CSA Random Thoughts While Running, received via e-mail on 21 April 97)

The e-mail nets were alive throughout the Army during the Advanced Warfighting Experiment (AWE) conducted at the National Training Center in March of 1997. Somewhere around 21 April 1997, significantly put out on e-mail, our Chief of Staff GEN Reimer put out a clarion call for action and thinking on the subject of the size of our battalions. In the e-mail he wrote, "We stayed away from tinkering with the maneuver battalions on purpose because we really wanted to see what we had first. However, now that we see what we've got (based upon the results of the AWE *author note*), I think it's time to take this one on in earnest." (CSA Note)

The power of the new information technology the Army is testing is awesome. While it is not a panacea, the sooner we in the Army exploit this technology and articulate what it is we want the technology to do for us, the better we will be able to retain our fighting edge over potential adversaries. I once heard COL Jim McDonough, then Director of the School of Advanced Military Studies, call this the "Billy-Jack" approach. We will demonstrate what we can do to our enemies, and they know there is nothing they can do to stop us. This is the right attitude to take in an increasingly hostile world. This is asymmetrical application of force. Demonstration of conventional power is a deterrent.

The purpose of this essay is to outline a "modest proposal" for the structure of the tank battalion after next. I am deliberately staking out an extreme position in the hopes it will raise the blood pressure of my contemporaries and thus bring on the debate we really ought to be having in regards to this topic. Unless we in the Armor Force do this, we may find ourselves sounding like MG John K. Herr, the last Chief of Cavalry, arguing for keeping the horse cavalry while the rest of the Army modernized. In 1938, MG Herr said, "We must not be misled to our own detriment to assume that the untried machine can displace the proved and tried horse." (Petras, p.106) Similar words are spoken about the computer and information systems. We cannot be left behind.

I propose that the Armor battalion be reorganized as shown in Figure 1.

The organization I propose is smaller, thus it should be more strategically mobile. The heart of the matter is what is NOT in the battalion.

Assuming we can achieve maintenance situational awareness and just-in-time supply, we can then remove the maintenance platoon, support platoon, medical platoon — essentially all of the CS and CSS functions from the battalion. We can have battalions without staffs. The sole function of the battalion is to prepare tankers for war through training as crews, platoons, and companies. The battalion commander, his X3, and CSM are the proper trainers of the battalion's troopers. The Army selects these men based upon their demonstrated potential for future service, thus we can empower them to train their outfits. The CS and CSS functions are captured by the use of electronic means and transmitted to the proper level. We can make these networks happen in the field and the garrison.

I propose a battalion without a staff in the traditional sense. Capitalizing on the strengths of the information systems now available, as well as those in the near future, we can eliminate the staff at the level of the fighting element. There is, of course, the corresponding requirement to have an in-place support system in garrison and in the field to meet the battalion's CS and CSS needs. We can achieve these economies through the use of information systems we have on hand. The S1/personnel function can be taken care of at the central in-processing facility most divisions run right now. Our automated ID cards are supposed to carry information on the bar code on the back. It is time to make that work. Personnel transactions can then take place on a LAN with input from the 1SG (and the shadow staff any good 1SG will have, anyway).

The point is that the information systems must be/are in place before we put this effort into effect. A coordinated LAN within the division or brigade can take care of promotions, demotions, pay inquiries, etc. That is what the AGs of the force say, so it is time to put up.

The S4 supply functions will make use of the automated property book system we have, with refinements. The company commander would still be responsible for signing for his equipment and

Armor Battalion After Next

- 35 tanks, 9 HMMWVs
- 1 LTC, 1 MAJ, 1 CSM, 3 CPT, 12 LT, 3 1SGs, 11 SFC/19K40 (four Master Gunners), 15 SSG/19K30, 3 SSG/92A30, 109 PV1-SGT/19K10/20
- Total = 164 troopers

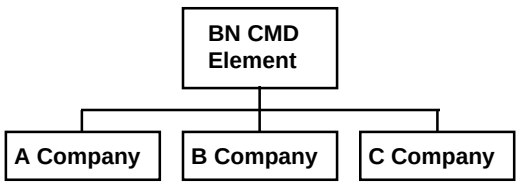

Figure 1

Armor Battalion After Next Command Element

- Two tanks, three HMMWVs
- 1 LTC, 1 MAJ, 1 CSM, 2 SFC (one Master Gunner), 4 19K 10-20, 3 19K10/20 HMMWV drivers
- Total = 12 troopers, 2 M1A2, 3 HMMWV

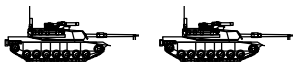

Figure 2

the monthly inventories. I really cannot see ever walking away from that need, even when we all look like the soldiers in Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*. The point is that in garrison we can take advantage of automated systems in place for the supply sergeants we will still need, if only for their familiarity with the CSS system and procedures. This integration can be at either brigade or division. The field system will take advantage of the systems for "just-in-time" logistics and the information-sharing systems which will track ammunition expenditure and fuel consumption.

The S2/S3 functions are handled through improved red and blue situational awareness. That is easy to say and very tough to execute, but within the realm of the possible given the power of the systems we have. Think about LTC "Abe" Abrams leading the 37th Tank into Bastogne. Abe led from the front and used his intuitive feel for battle and the enemy to guide the actions of his battalion. Battalions do not have a deep fight, they form the heart of the close fight of the brigade. Battalion commanders execute operations along with their troopers, and close with the enemy by fire and maneuver. This does not relieve the commander of the requirement to know the enemy and the terrain; in fact, the increased situational awareness afforded us via systems interface makes understanding the relationship of enemy, weather, terrain, capabilities, and the commander's estimate all the more important. Reports from the NTC seemed to indicate that the real problem was too much information and a lack of willingness to trust the information on the screen. Here then is the re-emergence of the art of command and battle leadership. The power of the information system will allow the commander to go to the critical point because he can first "see" where the critical point is, based on the positive knowledge of friendly locations and the collation of enemy locations on his display screen, then move to the point on the battlefield and see what is most important. In this way *fingerspitzengefuehl, coup d'oiel*, call it what you will, is enhanced, not befuddled, by technology. This situation will only get better as the systems improve and us "old dogs" learn some new tricks. Pilots say, "Trust the instruments." It is time for tankers to do likewise.

Here again are the words of our Chief of Staff, "In my opinion, we have at least a 30% increase in capabilities through situation awareness at the present time, and if we are able to develop it to its full potential, it could be a 50%-60% increase. Given the fact that, in power projection operations, getting capabilities there quickly makes a large difference, I think it's time we look at the size of these armor and mech infantry battalions and see if we can't downsize some of them. I know how emotional that is, but we have to take it on in my opinion." (CSA Note) This reduction in the size of the battalion also allows us to expand the number of heavy divisions while not exceeding the number ceiling placed on the Army by budget constraints.

The historians out there will quickly point out that the last Army to do this was the German Army after the invasion of Poland. The U.S. Army also did this during World War II, by decreasing the size and number of the armored regiments of the existing armored divisions in order to field more armored divisions. By saving 23 tanks from each battalion in the current force (five armored divisions each with five tank battalions), the Army could field at least three more reduced size armored divisions. Here are my numbers:

23 tanks from 25 battalions = 575 tanks

575 tanks = 2300 men = roughly 16 downsized battalions

The smaller battalions will enable the Army to focus and reduce the size of the support battalions and other battalions within the division. Since we cannot predict where and when the Army will be needed in the next fight, we can retain more, smaller armored divisions which give the Army more strategic flexibility in the application of force. Our Chief again put this thought concisely, "In my opinion, the Army has been drifting toward smaller, more mobile units in the last few years. I think most of us have recognized the need for strategic mobility, but we did not want to give up the combat capabilities we currently possessed." (CSA, 21 April 97) We are not giving up combat capabilities within the

Continued on Page 50

Armor Battalion After Next Tank Company

- Company Command Element
  - 1 CPT, 1 1LT (XO), 1 1SG, 2 SSGs, 1 SSG (92A Supply SGT), 4 19K10/20, 3 19K10/20 HMMWV drivers
- Tank Platoon
  - 3 2/1LT, 3 SFC (one Master gunner), 3 SSGs, 27 19K10/20
- Total = 49 troopers, 11 M1A2, 2 HMMWV

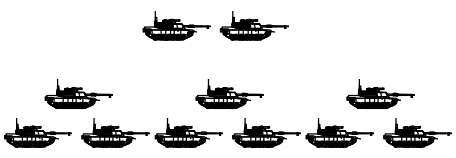

Figure 3

Battalion After Next *Cont'd. from Page 13*

battalion or the division as we can truly increase the situational awareness of the commanders and then do what philosophers of war have exhorted throughout the ages, get the right mix of force to the right/critical place on the battlefield at precisely the right time. Information systems can give us this edge in the next fight.

This downsizing does not overlook the requirement to train. Smaller is not better, better is better, to paraphrase GEN Sullivan, our retired CSA and a distinguished tanker. The current Chief of Armor wrote in an e-mail note to the CG of TRADOC, "Digital equipment doesn't make a digital force. The force must be well trained and experienced to be decisive." (MG Harmeyer Note to the CG TRADOC, 28 March 1997) We can concentrate on the task at hand, which is training ourselves and our troopers to take the maximum advantage of the digital equipment and information systems we have within our force. The tank battalion commander will have just tankers to train, and a higher leader-to-led ratio within the battalion.

Are there more changes possible due to our new abilities to focus battle command? There certainly are, and they should be the focus of other articles in this journal and other professional journals. For instance, the entire system of TOC/TAC/Rear/Command Group needs to be evaluated and streamlined for rapid decision-making and command and control at the brigade, division, and even corps level. Our staff system needs another look; after all, we've been using the French staff system since Black Jack Pershing adopted it in France in 1917. The focus of main effort for this journal right now needs to be, what should we, the armored force, look like in the Army after next?

An undated, unsigned e-mail forwarded all over the Army contained this impression of the Advanced Warfighting Experiment, "the results were much better than the pessimists expected and not quite as good as the optimists were hoping for. Under normal NTC rotation conditions, it would have been labeled a draw." (undated note off the Army e-mail, Subject: AWE at NTC) In my own experience against the OPFOR, a draw is not that bad, and considering that the fellows in COL Goedkoop's brigade had to spend time learning how to use the appliqué equipment and make sense of the systems, it reinforces the Chief of Armor's point that digital equipment does not a digital force make. We need to train and train hard. This, in itself, does not alter the fact that the potential for a real breakthrough in how we fight is just around the corner.

The focus on the size and purpose of our tank battalions is worthy of lots of chin stroking and deep thinking. Either we armored force officers do this, or the Beltway bandits and Armed Service Committee staffers will do it for us. I see the battalions of the future being the buildings blocks for the reinforced brigades of the future, which in turn will do what our divisions of today do. It will be a while, and our hair will be white, or in my case completely gone, before this transformation happens throughout the force. It may be that brigade commanders will be the big boys to aspire to be like — they will probably need to be brigadiers, with colonels as the XO/Dep Cdr, with subordinate battalions assigned as the mission dictates; sounds like the combat commands of the original Armored Force, doesn't it? In that kind of environment, the battalion's structure seems like a pretty big deal to me.

These have been one man's thoughts and musings, based on 20 years in our Armored Force. BG Chaffee, the father of the modern armored force, once said that the armored force is not only the tank, but all arms and services, with equal glory for all. We need to recapture that spirit and recast the Armored Force as THE force for the warfare of the information age. What do the rest of you think? If you don't write it, no one will ever know.

LTC Kevin C.M. Benson is currently the Chief of War Plans at Third U.S. Army. He served in armor and cavalry units in the United States and Germany, as the Chief of Plans of the XVIII Abn Corps, and as the Regimental Executive Officer of the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment. He is a graduate of the Army Command and Staff College, and the School of Advanced Military Studies. He has been published in *Parameters, Military Review, Army,* and *Armor, Infantry,* and *Special Operations* journals.